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# The Religious Ideology Behind Sexual Violence: A Poststructuralist and Feminist Understanding of the 2014 Yazidi Genocide

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# Declaration

I, Cecilie Årstadvold Driveklepp, declare that this thesis is a result of my research investigations and findings. Sources of information other than my own have been acknowledged and a reference list has been appended. This work has not been previously submitted to any other university for award of any type of academic degree.

Signature……..

Date……

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# Abstract

During August in 2014, the Yazidi minority in the Sinjar region in Iraq were victims of a genocide caused by the religious ideology of the Islamic State, ISIS. The men were killed, while the women and girls were forced into sexual slavery. ISIS defends their actions through their ideological interpretation of Islamic religious texts, based on a Sufist political ideology. My thesis will look at ISIS's use of religious ideology and gendered structures through a poststructuralist and feminist theoretical perspective. Through a poststructuralist perspective, I will look into how ISIS's ideology reflects on their understanding and teachings of Islamic texts such as the Qur'an, the discourse surrounding gender and sexuality which makes the Yazidi women victims of sexual violence. Through a feminist perspective, I will analyse the gendered power structures around sex and sexuality leading to the Yazidi women losing agency and autonomy over their own body and sexuality. This will show that the Yazidi women are not just victims of extremist Islamic violence, but were also victims because of the structures and discourse surrounding gender, power and sexuality.

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# Introduction

In the course of two weeks during August of 2014, the Islamic State (IS), a militant Islamic religious group (also known as the "Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant", ISIL, and "Islamic State of Iraq and Syria", ISIS), invaded the Sinjar region of Iraq to perform an ethnic cleansing and genocide on the Yazidi minority. The Yazidis are known for their unique religious and ethnic background, having their own set of beliefs, rituals and traditions which are important to their culture. Their unique set of beliefs have made them a target for genocide, harrassment and persecution for centuries, where according to Nadia's Initiative, there have been 73 instances of genocide recorded in Yazidi history. Because of the threats to their population, the majority of the Yazidis chose to settle in Sinjar, in the northern region of Iraq with mountainous terrain for protection. During the invasion by ISIS in 2014, many Yazidis fled to the mountains, but the people who were left were taken by ISIS fighters and forced to convert to Sunnism (the Sunni branch in Islamic religion), or face the repercussions. The Yazidis refused, and the men were executed, while the women and girls were taken to become *sabayas*, sex slaves for the IS fighters to be bought and sold. The younger boys were taken to become future IS soldiers or used as shields (Murad, 2017, p. 81). More than 6000 women and children were taken captive and around 2800 are still missing to this day according to Nadia's Initiative (Nadia's Initiative, n.d.). Sexual violence against the Yazidi women was used as a strategic weapon of war by IS, justified through their ideological interpretation of the Islamic religious texts such as the Qur'an and the hadiths.

I developed an interest in this topic after listening to Yazidi, former ISIS sex slave and now human rights activist, Nobel Peace Prize recipient and founder of the organisation "Nadia's Initiative", Nadia Murad, on the podcast "Dua Lipa: At Your Service". Murad told her story about how she was captured, the culture of the Yazidis, her experience in captivity and the genocide. Nadia Murad is actively fighting and seeking support from international organizations and governments to help rebuild the Yazidi community and homeland, and help the women who have been victims of sexual violence. Through the research and writing process of this thesis, I have been following Murad actively on the social media platform *Instagram*, where she has given updates on Yazidi women who have either been found, managed to escape or pronounced dead. Murad's consistent updates on her activism and the status of the captured women shows us that even if the main conflict and war is over in Iraq, women are still currently suffering as a byproduct of the war.

Listening to Nadia's story made me research the genocide further and watch interviews with Yazidi women who had escaped sexual slavery. In addition, I read Murad's autobiographical book *"The Last Girl"*, where she in depth writes about the genocide and her experience of sexual slavery. I got interested in the religious structures commonly raised as a justification to the acts of sexual violence against the Yazidi women, and how the men justified their actions through religious scripture. I started to look into the religious scripture, mainly the Qur'an, to understand how ISIS justifies these acts through their ideological interpretation of these texts. As the genocide and sexual slavery was centered around gender and sexuality, because the men were killed and women taken as *sabayas*, sex slaves, the role of gendered power structures was prevalent in the genocide. The religious discourse and gendered power structures leading to the genocide and the sexual violence are themes consistent with the political theories of poststructuralism and feminism. Through using these theories, I wanted to look more deeply into the discourse and structures which lead to the sexual violence and sexual slavery against the Yazidi women and girls, inside and outside of the Islamic religious sources. By understanding the underlying discourse and dominating gendered structures leading to the sexual violence, we can get a broader understanding of why the women were victims of sexual violence. By searching for underlying discourses and gendered power structures within the Islamic State and wartime sexual violence, one can look for deeper social constructions leading to sexual violence over criticising Islamic religion as a main culprit of violence.

*Research question*

The main research question for this thesis will be:

Through a poststructuralist and feminist theoretical perspective, how did the religious ideology of the Islamic State lead to sexual violence against Yazidi women and girls?

From the main research question, the sub-research questions will look at the following:

- How did ISIS's interpretation of Islamic, religious texts lead to sexual violence against Yazidi women and girls?
- Why is gendered discourse in social structures and relations leading to sexual violence against Yazidi women and girls?

- What role does gendered structures and discourse play in controlling female sexuality and sexual agency?

*Literature*

As this thesis is structured around the theories of poststructuralism and feminism, I will utilise literature from scholars within these theoretical fields to build my arguments and analysis. The poststructuralist theoretical analysis will apply ideas and relevant theoretical concepts from scholars such as Lene Hansen, Jane Sunderland, Jennifer Milliken and Michel Foucault. I chose to build my poststructuralist theoretical analysis through their work as they focus on the social construction of reality, the importance of discourse in shaping social relations and structures, and the structures around the topic of sexuality and sexual relations.

The feminist analysis is utilising feminist scholars Laura Sjoberg, Susan Brownmiller and Wendy Brown. As the feminist theoretical analysis is shaped around the topic of gendered power structures, sexual violence and controlling the female body, I chose feminist scholars who discuss topics such as rape (Brownmiller), gendered power structures (Sjoberg) and linking sex and sexuality to politics (Brown).

As the thesis is based around religious ideology and the experience of Yazidi women, I will utilize non-academic secondary sources to build the narrative surrounding the genocide and the sexual slavery. Religious texts will be frequently used and referenced throughout the analysis, where most of the material is sourced from the Qur'an. I chose to use an edition of the Qur'an by Adil Salahi, named "The Qur'an: A translation for the 21st Century". I chose this version because I found through Islamic sources of the Qur'an online how different the translations were, and some were more difficult to understand than others. Because there were so many different translations, it would be easier to have one main source as a reference, and Salahi made translations which were easy to understand and interpret. Salahi also provides information about the different surahs, their context and historical background, which made it easier for me to understand the surah and its message. The second non-academic literary source utilized is the autobiography *"The Last Girl"* by Nadia Murad, as her book gave a lot more nuance and insight into the sexual violence and slavery which was not talked about in so much depth in the interviews with Yazidi women and ISIS fighters.

The theoretical and secondary sources will through the research process be analysed through a thematic analysis, where I look for codes and themes present which relate to the theoretical foundation of my thesis, the poststructuralist and feminist theoretical analysis. Codes and themes relating to a feminist analysis are examples such as female sexual agency

and gendered sexual violence. As most of the secondary sources is based around personal stories through autobiographies and interviews, the analysis will also be focused around a narrative analysis, where the experience of the participants (the Yazidi women and ISIS fighters) gives more insight into the situations and events leading up to, during and after the genocide and sexual slavery. The use of the Qur'an will help form and expand on the narrative expressed by the participants, as religious sources such as the Qur'an was used as a tool of violence by ISIS throughout the genocide, and has been used to justify religious violence by extremist, religious groups through many historical events.

*Thesis structure*

The thesis will start by looking into the theoretical and conceptual frameworks in which I will structure my research and findings around. I will explain the concepts of wartime sexual violence (WSV) and religious ideology. Then I will give a brief introduction to the poststructuralist and feminist theories.

After, I will provide relevant background information about the religious ideology of the Islamic State, and the conflict and events which led up to the genocide and sexual slavery of the Yazidi minority. The chapter on methodology will follow, where I explain my research method, data collection method, research design, data analysis, trustworthiness, limitations and ethical considerations during my research process.

The analysis will follow, where I first focus my analysis on the poststructuralist theory, in three main parts: 1. Religious ideology: Textual context and interpretation, 2. Discourse of gender and sexuality, and 3. Sexuality, power and knowledge. The feminist theoretical analysis will follow, also discussed in three main parts: 1. Gender and power: The role of gendered institutions, 2. Sexual violence and sexual coercion, and 3: Controlling female sexuality: Women as reproductive vessels, not sexual beings.

After the analysis, there will be a discussion about the main findings, my thoughts around the findings and the limitations I experienced during the process which affected my research and findings, before ending with the conclusion.

# Theoretical and conceptual framework

## The concept of wartime sexual violence

Before looking at the concept of wartime sexual violence , it is important to understand the concept of sexual violence set apart from its involvement in war and conflict. The concept of wartime sexual violence look more into why sexual violence is used as a tool in war, while the concept of sexual violence explains what defines sexual violence, and why sexual abuse is occuring. The act of sexual violence are used in multiple forms, from physical to mental abuse of the victims. This means sexual violence includes both the acts surrounding abusive sexual relationships, and the social coercion and pressure leading the the sexual abuse. The list of what encompasses sexual violence according to the World Health Organization (WHO) includes (World Health Organization, 2012, p. 1):

- rape within marriage or dating relationships
- rape by strangers or acquaintances
- unwanted sexual advances or sexual harassment (at school, work etc.)
- systematic rape, sexual slavery and other forms of violence, which are particularly common in armed conflicts (e.g. forced impregnation)
- sexual abuse of mentally or physically disabled people
- rape and sexual abuse of children
- 'customary' forms of sexual violence, such as forced marriage or cohabitation and wife inheritance.

Sexual violence can take form through consensual and non-consensual sexual acts by the perpetrator/perpetrators and the victim/victims. It is seen as non-consensual when the victim is unable to give consent to the sexual act through means of threats of violence, bodily harm or to their life, mentally incapable through ex. intoxication or being mentally incapacitated (World Health Organization, 2012, p. 2). Sexual abuse against children should also fall under non-consensual, because children are unable to knowingly consent to sexual acts. Consensual acts of sexual violence look at the underlying factors and circumstances surrounding why the victim agrees to the acts of sexual violence. The victim might agree to the sexual acts to avoid physical harm such as being beaten or starved. The victim might have gone through psychological trauma in their childhood or from their partners making them easy targets for sexual abuse through coercion (World Health Organization, 2012, pp. 2-4). Sexual harassment and abuse at schools/universities and the workplace are common, where power structures lead to unwanted sexual advances, especially against women. The woman might

consent to the sexual act in fear of losing her job or to avoid failing the class (World Health Organization, 2012, pp. 4-5). Societal factors such as traditional gender roles, where ex. sex is seen as man's right in a marriage and the wife is forced to take part in the sexual acts, or factors such as societal institutions (such as the legal systems) not protecting women against sexual violence, making them forced to consent to the sexual demands (World Health Organization, 2012, p. 6).

The concept of wartime sexual violence (WSV) focuses on the use of sexual violence, especially rape, as a military and political strategy tool which occurs during times of war and conflict (Not a weapon of war). WSV is seen as a deliberate tactic in warfare according to the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) (United Nations Development Fund for Women, n.d., p. 1). It is important to mention that sexual violence is also used against men as a tool during war and conflict, but as the main focus of this thesis focus on the Yazidi women, I will focus on the use of sexual violence against women in war and conflict. The tactical use of rape in war seeks to destroy communities from within, as it destroys the individuals who the acts where committed against, and the community around them. The women are left with both physical and mental trauma, such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), bodily injuries, unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases after the abuse (United Nations Development Fund for Women, n.d., p.1). Rape is also being used as a tool of genocide, by systematically destroying ethnic or minority groups dependent on their ethnic lineage by only marrying and have intercourse with a man/woman of their same ethnic group, which was one of the tools used by ISIS during the genocide against the Yazidi minority (United Nations, 2014, p. 1). The acts of rape can occur during the attack on the group, or after by forcing the women into sexual slavery, as the Yazidi women were. During the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, where the Tutsi minority ethnic group was targeted by Hutu militia, it is estimated between 250.000 and 500.000 Tutsi women and girls were subjected to rape during the attack (United Nations Development Fund for Women, n.d., p. 1). These two relatively recent events where the use of sexual violence was used as a tool, show just how prevalent sexual violence is used during war and conflict in our recent history, as it has been used as a tool of violence against women in human history for centuries.

## Religious ideology

An ideology is defined by the Cambridge Dictionary as *a set of beliefs or principles, especially one on which a political system, party, or organization is based* (Cambridge). It is a belief system centred around how a society should be structured based on the principles and moral convictions, set by a person or a group. Examples of ideologies are political and economic ideas such as marxism, socialism, liberalism and capitalism. Ideologies are also centred around social and cultural principles, which dictates the values of the people in a society; the people in power and who gives them the power. A definition of ideology recited by Gerring (1997) states: *"An emotion-laden, myth-saturated, action-related system of beliefs and values about people and society, legitimacy and authority, that is acquired to a large extent as a matter of faith and habit. The myths and values of ideology are communicated through symbols in a simplified, economical, and efficient matter. Ideological beliefs are more or less coherent, more or less articulate, more or less open to new evidence and information. Ideologies have a high potential for mass mobilization, manipulation, and control; in that sense, they are mobilized belief systems"* (Gerring, 1997, p. 959). An ideology is, in essence, just a set of ideas created around how a society should function and who should be the ruler(s). If a group or person promoting an ideology starts mobilising and establishes an expanding follower base, there are possibilities for societal changes if the ideological party or group gains power. This power can be gained through soft power tactics or hard power tactics. Soft and hard power tactics are concepts often spoken about in international state affairs, where one state uses power tactics to influence the behaviour of another state (Matteucci, n.d.), but soft and hard power tactics can be used on smaller, more local or national scales. Soft power relies more on cooperation and diplomacy to gain power through persuasion and attraction, making citizens or states willingly participate by influencing their values and ideals (Matteucci, n.d.). Hard power tactics rely more on military power, sanctions and diplomatic isolation to achieve a goal (Matteucci, n.d.), where the recipients of the hard power are forced to accept the terms, or face the consequences.

Religious ideology is centred around the basis of an ideology, where the structuring of a political system, party or organisation is centred around the beliefs and principles of the participants, but the beliefs and principles are centred around one certain religion. But just as ideologies are ideas based on human concepts of how society should function, religious ideology is no different, as the person or group promoting their ideology interprets the religion through their own sets of ideas of how a society should function, and who should be the ruler. Hussain (2017) writes: *"But it's important to realize that ideologies are human concepts. They are the codification and structuring of a set of ideas into a way of perceiving*

*the world. A religious ideology is no different - it codifies and organizes human interpretation of scriptural teachings and teaches the group to reject or accept based on the codified ideas"* (Hussain, 2017). A religion is apolitical in nature, focused on spiritual practice and the worship of one or multiple Gods, or other faith-based ideas and entities, focused on guidance and connection to the self and to a community. "*While it seems to uphold and defend religion, an overbearing ideological approach undermines the deepest and most profound aspects of religion. It binds men to specific ways of filtering and judging reality instead of doing what religion is meant to do - to bind men to God and thus unfold for them a clear insight to reality. An insight that is necessary if society is to apply revelation to one's era in the most beneficial way possible - an insight that promotes the growth of knowledge across all fields, that leads to spiritual depth, and a connected humanity"* (Hussain, 2017). The goal of a religious ideological group is not for the participants to deepen their religious practice or promote its fundamental, good principles, but to use their interpretation of a religion as a tool to gain power and establish a political goal.

## Poststructuralist theory

Poststructuralism is a perspective within international relations which challenges the realist and liberalist traditional principles of rationality, of using scientific, epistemological methods to characterise and explain the behaviour of states and its actors (Hansen, 1997, p. 371). While the traditional foundations of IR look at the world order through a lens of anarchy, where the states are actors working in their own self-interest, explained through a scientific perspective of characterising social behaviour, the poststructuralists advocates for the deconstruction of the present state of the societal landscape (Hansen, 1997, pp. 371-72). It challenges the simple approach of a fixed global landscape "as it is", by looking into the hidden meanings, contexts, interpretations, history and the social constructs/discourses surrounding our present perception of reality (Hansen, 1997, p. 372). Poststructuralism does not see reality as a fixed state of meanings, it sees meanings as constructed realities through a system of social relations, and the meanings are constructed through our discourse.

Discourse can be defined, according to Holzscheiter (2014), as *"basically, the space where intersubjective meaning is created, sustained, trans- formed and, accordingly, becomes constitutive of social reality"* (Holzscheiter, 2014, p. 144). Discourses are not a fact of the material world, as they are systems of language and social practises constructed into a social

reality, as Milliken (1999) writes: *"[...] though, discourses do not exist 'out there' in the world; rather, they are structures that are actualized in their regular use by people of discursively ordered relationships in 'ready-at-hand language practices' or other modes of signification"* (Milliken, 1999, p. 231). Through a discourse analysis, one can analyse the type of language leading to the social construction of reality and what type of action is taken, and who is given the power to act on the policies constructed through this socially constructed reality. Milliken (1999) writes: *"The point here is that beyond giving a language for speaking about (analysing, classifying) phenomena, discourses make intelligible some ways of being in, and acting towards, the world, and of operationalizing a particular 'regime of truth' while excluding other possible modes of identity and action. More specifically, discourses define subjects authorized to speak and to act ( e.g. foreign policy officials, defence intellectuals, development experts) and 'the relations within which they see and are seen by each other and in terms of which they conduct the [...] business with respect to that issue-area"* (Milliken, 1999, p. 229). By deconstructing the language and social practices used by the Islamic State, one can understand the social conditioning leading to men (and women) choosing to join the organisation, who is making the decisions and has the power, and their justification for conducting a genocide against the Yazidi population and using the Yazidi women and girls as sex slaves.

## Feminist theory

Feminist theory is, similar to poststructuralist theory, focused on studying the underlying constructions of reality, moving away from a dualistic worldview of power relations, where one has, through a natural, scientific understanding, power over the other (Ferguson, 2017, p. 271). Feminism looks at the concept of gender through a lens of intersectionality and interdisciplinarity to understand the underlying power structures leading to gender inequality through a construction of gender roles.

Intersectionality is defined as *"The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage; a theoretical approach based on such a premise."* (Perlman, 2018). By looking at the underlying structures based around race, class and gender, we can study the different systems of oppression and their outcomes on gendered structures. Not every woman experiences the same type of oppression globally. Example, a black

woman will have a very different experience of oppression and forced gender roles than a white woman, or a woman living in the Middle East will not experience the same gender structures as an American woman. Carastathis (2014) writes: *"It has become commonplace within feminist theory to claim that women's lives are constructed by multiple, intersecting systems of oppression. This insight–that oppression is not a singular process or a binary political relation, but is better understood as constituted by multiple, converging, or interwoven systems–originates in antiracist feminist critiques of the claim that women's oppression could be captured through an analysis of gender alone"* (Carastathis, 2014, p. 304). By understanding the multiple levels of systems leading to different types of oppression, more women are invited to have a voice and share their experience and knowledge. Example, a woman who joined ISIS by choice and willingly married an ISIS fighter will have a very different experience of oppression than a woman who was taken by force to become an ISIS sex slave. It is also important to notice that women also take part in the oppression of other women because of these intersectional, oppressive systems.

Interdisciplinarity is the use of multiple academic fields to better understand the intersections of the gendered power structures, by inviting academics from different disciplines to get a wider overview and offer alternative explanations and solutions (Ferguson, 2017, p. 274). Because gendered oppression is a result of multiple causes (geographic, political, social, cultural, economic, religious, historical, biological…), having an intersection of different academic disciplines is important to make sense of the systems causing the oppression. As Ferguson writes: *"[Grewal] urges us to recognize "a messier world, where writing, researching, objects, and subjects of research refuse to remain neatly within the boundaries that discipline them," both because the world is messier than disciplinary separations allow and because feminist questions, well-pursued, mess with disciplinary order"* (Ferguson, 2017, p. 274). To understand why the Yazidi (young) women were forced into sexual slavery, it is not enough to understand it through, for example, a historical academic field. There are multiple factors as to why the Yazidi women were taken captive, based on disciplines such as social science, religious studies, conflict-studies and gender-studies. Widening the understanding of the different structures leading to gendered power structures helps us see how these structures occur, how they are practised and how to change them.

# Background: ISIS' religious ideology and the Yazidi genocide

The following chapter will look into the background and history behind the religious ideology of the Islamic State to understand how and why they operate in a way which harms both Muslims and non-Muslims through their Sufist Islamic ideology. The chapter will also look at the background of the Yazidi genocide, why they were targeted, what happened during the attack and the current state of the Yazidi population.

## The religious ideology of the Islamic State

The Islamic State (IS) is known by multiple names; Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and the Arabic acronym Daesh/Da'ish (al-Dawla al-Islamiya fi al-Iraq wa al-Sham). IS bases their ideology on an authentic form of Islam practised by early muslim generations, inspired by movements such as Salafism and Wahhabism (Hassan, 2016, p. 1). Their ideology is also based around the ideas and literature of Islamic ideologues who support their vision, revolutionary ideas and political movements through the 20th century (Hassan, 2016, p. 1). Their ideology is not easily traced to one single origin of Islamic religion and practice, but is a result of carefully selected ideas, different roots of Islamic interpretations and Islamic scholars.

Salafism is a movement centred around the revival and representation of authentic Islam, practised by the early generations of Muslims, with its roots in Wahhabism, a strict form of Islamic practice. Wahhabism embraces extreme traditionalism and literalism, and rejects multiple principles of Islamic practice such as *kalam*; Islamic philosophy, *sufism*; Islamic spirituality and *ilal*; the religious intentions in the Islamic texts (Hassan, 2016, p. 4). The Wahhabi concepts of *wala wal bara* and *tawhid* are actively used by salafists to justify violence against non-Muslims and Muslims who are taking part in *un-Islamic practices*. (Hassan, 2016, p. 5). *Tawhid* means to worship God, and only worship one God, being against polytheism. Polytheistic practices present in Islam according to ISIS are superstitions and soothsayers, imams and deities, as they diminish the worship of God, control and shape Muslim societies (Hassan, 2016, p. 5). *Wala wal bara* is the loyalty to Islam and rejection of un-Islamic practices, such as polytheism. If Muslims are not practicing Islam correctly according to *wahhabist* standards, one must show them hate, hostility and enmity for the people who do not act according to the concept of *tawhid* (Hassan, 2016, p. 5).

During the 20th century, different political movements, practices and concepts influenced the religious ideology of the Islamic State. One example is the practice of *takfir*, which became prominent in the 1960s in Egypt, which is the practice of excommunication/exclusion, where one Muslim accuses another Muslim of being an infidel to the Islamic faith (Hassan, 2016, p. 6). This practice was embraced by Sayyid Qutb, leader of the Muslim Brotherhood during the 1950s-60s, who believed in a *takfir* ideology, where the only right global system is a system under a conservative Islam, arguing that all other systems such as communism and capitalism had failed (Hassan, 2016, pp. 6-7). Concepts by Qutb used by the Islamic State are *hakimiyya* and *jahiliyya*, which seeks to control the population and ethnic groups to transform into their idea of a true and authentic Islam. The salafist movement in essence, based their ideology on the idea of an authentic Islamic State which would define who were real Muslims. The Islamic State has taken the takfir concept to the extreme length of justifying violence against Muslim civilians, distinguishing the IS from the other Islamic terrorist organisation *Al-Qaeda*, as the latter focus on the far enemy (the West, example The United States), while IS transforms the focus to the enemy within, the Shia Muslim population and other enemies of their ideological religious faith (Hassan, 2016, p. 9). Wood (2015) writes: *"Following takfiri doctrine, the Islamic State is committed to purifying the world by killing vast numbers of people. The lack of objective reporting from its territory makes the true extent of the slaughter unknowable, but social-media posts from the region suggest that individual executions happen more or less continually, and mass executions every few weeks. Muslim "apostates" are the most common victims"* (Wood, 2015). The overall goal of the Islamic State is to establish a global Islamic caliphate, meaning a political institution under the leadership of a Muslim ruler which adheres to the standards of the religious ideology of the Islamic State. The last caliphate was the Ottoman empire, which reached its peak during the 17th century before slowly losing influence until its official dismantlement in 1924 (Wood, 2015). The Ottoman empire however, did not govern under a strict, extremist ideology of the Islamic faith which ISIS wants to force. But the empire still targeted the Yazidi population during the 19th century for their faith.

## The conflict and genocide of the Yazidi minority

The Yazidi minority have been targeted for their religion and culture several times throughout history, saying they have been victims *of 72 previous genocides, or attempts at*

*annihilation* (Asher-Schapiro, 2014). Even though most Yazidis identify as Kurdish and speak the language, their faith and culture is distinguishing and separating them from the Kurdish Sunni population, rooted in Islamic religion and culture (Asher-Schapiro, 2014). The Yazidi faith is based on an ancient religion founded in the 11th century, with its roots in Zoroastrianism (a persian faith), Islam and Christianity. Their religion is passed through practice and stories through generations, as there is no holy book or texts. Nadia Murad gives an explanation of their religion in her book: *"Yazidism is an ancient monotheistic religion, spread orally by holy men entrusted with our stories. Although it has elements in common with the many religions of the Middle East, from Mithraism and Zoroastrianism to Islam and Judaism, it is truly unique and can be difficult even for the holy men who memorize our stories to explain. I think of my religion as being an ancient tree with thousands of rings, each telling a story in the long history of Yazidis. Many of those stories, sadly, are tragedies"* (Murad, 2017, p. 12). The core figure of worship in their religion is the fallen angel, *Tawusi Melek*. Tawusi Melek takes shape in the form of a peacock, and is one of the seven angels sent by God. Their devotion to Tawusi Melek has branded the Yazidis as devil worshippers, comparing their peacock angel to Iblis, the devil figure in the Qur'an (Murad, 2017, p. 25). Murad tells us how this connection was made in her book:

*After forming the universe from the pieces of a broken pearl-like sphere, God sent his chief Angel, Tawusi Melek, to earth, where he took the form of a peacock and painted the world the bright colors of his feathers. The story goes that on earth, Tawusi Melek sees Adam, the first man, whom God has made immortal and perfect, and the Angel challenges God's decision. If Adam is to reproduce, Tawusi Melek suggests, he can't be immortal, and he can't be perfect. He has to eat wheat, which God has forbidden him to do. God tells his Angel that the decision is his, putting the fate of the world in Tawusi Melek's hands. Adam eats wheat, is expelled from paradise, and the second generation of Yazidis are born into the world. Proving his worthiness to God, the Peacock Angel became God's connection to earth and man's link to the heavens. [...] It hurts to say it, and Yazidis aren't even supposed to utter the words, but many people in Iraq hear the story of the Peacock Angel and call us devil worshippers. Tawusi Melek, they say, is God's chief Angel, like Iblis, the devil figure of the Koran. They claim that our Angel defied Adam and therefore God. Some cite texts—usually written by outside scholars in the early twentieth century who were unfamiliar with the Yazidi oral tradition—that say that Tawusi Melek was sent to Hell for refusing to bow to Adam, which is not true. This is a misinterpretation, and it has had terrible consequences. The story*

*we use to explain the core of our faith and everything we think of as good about the Yazidi religion is the same story others use to justify genocide against us* (Murad, 2017, p. 25).

Because of this misinterpretation of their religion, the Yazidis are easily targeted by extremist Islamic groups such as ISIS, which has forced them to relocate and flee from violence. After Saddam Hussein launched Arabization campaigns in the 1970s, the Yazidis were targeted, and pulled out of their homes and villages and forced to relocate in urban areas which disturbed their cultural roots tied with agriculturalism. Hussein then constructed the town of Sinjar near Kocho, next to the Sinjar mountains (Asher-Schapiro, 2014). The majority of the Yazidi population lived in the Sinjar region until August 2014, when ISIS invaded the region during the course of two weeks in an effort to ethnically cleanse the Yazidis through their vision of a rightful Islamic world order based on their religious ideology (Nadia's Initiative, n.d.). Around 400 000 Yazidis fled their homes before the invasion, most fled to the neighbouring Kurdistan regions, while thousands seeked refuge in the mountains. The people who were unable to escape or chose to stay were taken by ISIS when they invaded the region (Nadia's Initiative, n.d.). The men were given the choice either to convert (to ISIS's Islamic religion) or die. The women were taken captives by ISIS to be married off to ISIS fighters, forced to convert and forced into sexual slavery through being sold at the slave market (Nadia's Initiative, n.d.). Today, the Yazidi population is suffering from the genocide through displacement, around 200 000 are displaced in northern Iraq, trauma, cultural loss and a struggle to rebuild their land. Around 2800 Yazidi women and children are still missing.

# Methodology

*Research methods*

This study will be based around a qualitative approach to research methods. Qualitative research is a method focused around understanding the social world through a more interpretivist approach, meaning that the researcher is looking at the social constructions and the interpretations of reality by the participants in the social landscape (Bryman et.al, 2021, p. 350). Bryman et.al (2021) describes qualitative research as "[...]a type of research strategy that emphasises words, images, and objects when collecting and

analysing data. It is broadly inductivist, constructionist, and interpretivist, but can take a wide variety of forms" (Bryman et.al, 2021, p. 350). Inductivist research means developing a theory from the observations and data collected during the research process (Bryman et.al, 2021, p. 350). The main focus during my research process is to understand the social constructions and discourse in the religious ideology of the Islamic State (ISIS) which led to the genocide and sexual violence against the Yazidi women and community in 2014. The research process will use qualitative research methods, by focusing on data collected from words and images, including secondary data to build on the theoretical and conceptual framework. The data falling in the category of words are religious texts, documents and books used by the Islamic State to justify their actions, examples being the Qur'an, the Sharia law and documents relating to the treatment of sex slaves. I will also use the autobiographical book "The Last Girl" by Nadia Murad in my research. In the category of images, I will use video interviews, documentaries or video reports relating to the Yazidi genocide, where Yazidi women and girls talk about their experience during captivity and the genocide. Interviews with ISIS fighters talking about the sexual slavery will also be applied.

*Research design*

The research design will focus around a case study design, as it "*involves detailed and intensive analysis of a single case*" (Bryman et.al, 2021, p. 59). The study is focused around specific groups and specific events, meaning the research will go in depth on the complexities and contexts within real world events and its outcomes. The study will focus on a single community, the Yazidi community (women and girls is particular), and a specific organisation (ISIS). The research is also focused around the specific event of the Yazidi genocide in 2014, by focusing on the actions and discourse leading up to the genocide, what actions were applied during the event, and the aftermath of the event. The type of case for this case study will focus on a critical case study. This type of case study is described by Bryman et.al (2021) as a case where "*the researcher has a well-developed theory, and they choose a case on the grounds that will allow a better understanding of the circumstances in which the hypothesis will and will not hold*" (Bryman et.al, 2021, p. 60). This means that the researcher knows what information they are looking for, and will sample cases which will give important information to the hypothesis. Because this case study is centered around how the religious ideology of ISIS led to sexual violence against Yazidi women, the selection of specific groups and events will highlight important information centered around this specific case, further developing the understanding of the case to answer the research question.

*Data collections methods*

For this research, the data collection method will be mainly focused around secondary data collection. Secondary data collection means using existing data which the researcher was not involved in collecting, for example through interviews and surveys (Bryman et.al, 2021, p. 294). There are two secondary data collections in this research. The first is by collecting documents as sources of data, which mainly relates to the population and case study during the research process. The documents in this category are personal documents (the autobiography by Nadia Murad), official documents (the laws and regulations utilised and written by the Islamic State, ex. the Sharia Law), and mass media documents (interviews of Yazidi women and ISIS fighters through news networks or international/non-governmental organisations) (Bryman et.al, 2021, pp. 298-99, 506, 509). These sources of data are collected to provide information and insight into the ideological discourse of the Islamic State, and the outcomes such discourse had on the Yazidi population. These documents will provide important information about the religious and societal structures within ISIS controlled areas, to be analysed further through the other secondary data collection method, which focuses on the theoretical literary sources.

The theoretical literary sources are utilised to build on the theoretical framework of the thesis, a post-structuralist theoretical framework and a feminist theoretical framework. This framework will also focus on the concepts of the thesis, as these concepts are rooted in more theoretical literary sources. The theoretical sources are based on published books, journals, peer reviewed literature and articles from scholarly and academic sources, found through databases, books sourced through the library, and academic literature from my master's programme. The Qur'an is difficult to classify in one of these two secondary data collection methods, as it utilises both methods in different ways. In the documents as a data collection method, the Qur'an scripture is cited in official documents such as the Sharia Law, and mentioned through interviews and in Nadia Murad's autobiography. In theoretical literary sources, the Qur'an is discussed through a theoretical lens, for example how women and gender are discussed in the Qur'an. Because the Qur'an relates to both of the secondary data collection methods, it can be classified as a third secondary data source, or an outside source which relates to both of the data collection methods.

During the research process for this thesis, I had plans to collect primary data through interviews with academics in fields relating to my research topic, such as feminist studies, conflict studies and gendered violence. I decided after some deliberation to mainly focus on

secondary data sources, as my main focus during my research was to answer why research questions through existing political theories. I noticed that all of the interview questions could be answered through the existing post-structuralist and feminist theoretical sources, meaning that the interviews would not provide more answers to the hypothesis than the existing secondary sources could. I was also asked if interviewing Yazidi women was an option for primary data collection, which I will discuss when talking about limitations and ethical considerations of this study.

*Data analysis*

The data collection will be analysed through a thematic and narrative analysis of the data collection. A thematic analysis is defined by Bryman et.al (2021) as "*a term used in connection with the analysis of qualitative data to refer to the extraction and of key themes in one's data*" (Bryman et.al, 2021, p. 615). A theme can be described as specific areas of interest for the researcher during the analysis of the data, where they through a process of coding of the data find patterns and meanings. To analyse the data through a thematic framework, I will transcribe data from interviews and examine and highlight relevant data from written sources to familiarise myself with the data. The next step is to start coding, by identifying the meanings and patterns found in the data. Through these codes, I can identify common themes found through these codes (Bryman et.al, 2021, p. 538).Examples of codes could be gender inequality and sexual assault, which could fall under the theme of gendered power structures. Through these themes, I can develop a narrative and look for sub-themes which might help to give a deeper understanding of the research. By conducting a thematic analysis, I can look for contexts within the data which helps build the narrative (Bryman et.al, 2021, p. 538).

A narrative analysis focuses more on personal experiences through examples like storytelling, and how they make sense of the world and what has happened (Bryman et.al, 2021, p. 542). Because one part of the data collection is centered around interviews with victims and perpetrators of the genocide and sexual violence, personal autobiographies and documents related to a religious ideology, a big part of the analysis of the data is focused on the narrative and personal experiences of the sampling population. By studying the rhetoric used in the data sources and their oral use and understanding of the religious texts for example, a narrative analysis can explain how ISIS practically uses religious texts to justify their actions against the Yazidi population.

*Trustworthiness and authenticity*

In qualitative research, the trustworthiness of the research is measured by four criteria: *Credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability* and *confirmability*. The *credibility* refers to whether the findings of the social reality are agreeable to others, as there are many different versions of social reality in qualitative research. Triangulation is often used in qualitative research for credibility, where the researcher's, according to Bryman et.al (2021), "use of more than one method or source of data to study social phenomena" (Bryman et.al, 2021, p. 364). The data for this research is collected from different sources, such as interviews, personal documents, religious literature and theoretical literature to be able to cross-reference and cross-validate findings (Bryman et.al, 2021, p. 364), which furthers the credibility of the study.

*Transferability* looks at the depth in which the social world is being studied, in how thick of a description for example the culture of the social phenomena is being studied, and can be transferred to other studies (Bryman et.al, 2021, pp. 365-66). The research highly focuses on the religious and cultural aspects of the Yazidi minority and the ISIS ideology, and uses the closest sources to explain these aspects through direct interviews with the Yazidi women and ISIS fighters, their personal documents, official documents and religious scriptures. This insight will make the research more transferable as the data comes directly from the credible sources who were present in the genocide.

*Dependability* is the collection of records during the research process saved by the researcher to keep an audit trail, making it possible for others (working on the research or not) to cross-check the procedures and decisions made in the research process (Bryman et.al, 2021, p. 366). Audit trails of the research process of this thesis is found in the research proposal, where I introduce the main topic, planned research topic and problem statement, literature, the theoretical and conceptual framework and the research design plan. The process of transcribing interviews, and coding findings from the data collections through a thematic analysis will be in the records.

Lastly, *Confirmability* refers to whether the researcher has stayed neutral during the research, data collection and writing process, acted in good faith and not let personal values and opinions affect the findings of the research (Bryman et.al, 2021, p. 366). I have no personal connection to the genocide, the Yazidi community or ISIS, or know anyone affected. The data collection is carefully collected from reliable sources, and has been cross-referenced in other sources to confirm their credibility. One example is the Qur'an, where I have

cross-examined the meaning of certain texts from multiple Islamic sources, rather than coming to my own interpretation of the meaning from one source.

*Limitations and ethical considerations*

There were two main ethical considerations which were considered in this study. The first ethical issue was using religious scripture, such as the Qur'an and the Hadiths, as a source of sexual violence. There are over two billion muslims today, to which these scriptures are very holy and important, but also highly discussed and a subject to negative discourse in an anti-muslim political landscape which has negatively affected many muslims. There is also the threat of offending the Qur'an, which can be dangerous because of Islamic terrorist organisations. Because the Qur'an is so prevalent in ISIS religious ideology, and highly present in the discourse leading to the sexual violence against the Yazidi women, I found it necessary to use as a source in this thesis. But because of this ethical consideration, it became very important to highlight the difference between the spiritual and cultural act of religion, and using religion to further a political ideology. The Qur'an and other holy scriptures are applied very differently by the people taking part in the religious practice.

The second ethical consideration refers to, as mentioned earlier, the idea of interviewing Yazidi women. During the process of finding previous research written about this topic, I found a thesis about ISIS's sexual violence towards to Yazidi women written by Christel Ghandour (2019). Her thesis "ISIS's Use of Sexual Violence in Iraq", focused on three theories: feminist theory, evolution theory and strategic rape concept. Through these theories, she examined why ISIS used sexual violence against the Yazidi women in their quest for power. She did not put much emphasis on the religious sources in her thesis. A part of her research was to travel to a Yazidi displacement camp, where she would interview women who had escaped from sexual slavery. She found that it was hard to find women who would want to participate in an interview, because they were scared for their own safety. Many women also had traumatic experiences from being interviewed by journalists and reliving their trauma during the interview without proper assistance, because they were promised help which never came (Ghandour, 2019). Ghandour also realised that the information she got from the women during the interviews were the same information given in earlier interviews by the Yazidi women which is openly available. Ghandour got more answers to her questions from interviewing people working in the NGOs in the area. Because i do not feel qualified to interview victims of trauma, do not find it ethical for victims of

sexual abuse to relive their trauma for my thesis and the available interviews of Yazidi women will provide reliable data according the the experience of Ghandour, I chose to abstain from doing interviews.

*Thematic analysis: Codes and themes*

When gathering data during the research process, I marked down the common codes, meaning the patterns most prominent to the case study from the secondary data sources and the theoretical literary sources. After finding the codes which fit into the different theoretical frameworks, poststructuralism and feminism, I sorted the codes into themes which helped me form the three different focus areas which will be discussed in the poststructuralist and feminist analysis. Following are codes found through the research process, colour coded through their theoretical belonging.

Poststructuralist codes

Feminist codes

Codes falling into both theories

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gendered politics | Gender imagery | Gendered sexual violence | Division of labour | Sexuality |
| Gendered institutions | Patriarchal order | Sexual discourse | Identity | Consent |
| Context | Sexuality and violence | Gendered clothing | Interpretations | Reproductive rights |
| Sexology | Ideological discourse | Gendered discourse | Domestic violence | Biopower |
| Agency | Construction of rape | Knowledge and power | Female sexual rights | Controlling female fertility |
| Wartime rape | | | Sexual coercion | Gendered power dimensions |

Through the codes relating to poststructuralist theory, I found codes relating to themes such as discourse around sexuality and identity, the importance of context through textual interpretations, constructions of sexuality and sexual violence, power structures relating to sexuality, genderes politics and institutions and the discourse surrounding ideology. The

themes resulting from this thematic analysis were the themes of *context and interpretations of religious ideology*, *discourse of gender and sexuality* and *sexuality, power and knowledge*.

The feminist theory codes were mainly focused around the aspects of gender and power, sexual violence and female sexual rights. The common themes from the feminist codes were the aspects of *gendered power institutions*, *sexual violence and sexual coercion*, and the *power over female sexuality and sexual agency*.

Through the categorisation of these different themes, I could link aspects of the findings in the secondary sources, such as the Qur'an, interviews and Nadia Murad's autobiography, with the theoretical framework.

# Poststructuralist theory: Understanding the discourse and ideological context leading to sexual violence

The following chapter will focus on a poststructuralist theoretical understanding of the sexual violence against Yazidi women and girls. The chapter consists of three main themes: The first theme is centred around the religious ideology of ISIS, focused on textual context and interpretation of the Qur'an, why context is important when studying religious texts and how ISIS misinterprets the text to further their religious ideology. The second theme analyses the discourse surrounding gender and sexuality, in why women were taken as sexual slaves, and why the men choose to join ISIS based on their religious, gendered and cultural beliefs. The third theme looks at the topic of sexuality, power and knowledge, focused around the theory of power and knowledge by Michel Foucault, and how power and knowledge is important when studying the discourse, social structures and power relations leading to sexual violence and suppression.

## Religious ideology: Textual context and interpretation

The Qur'an is the central religious scripture of Islam, containing the words of God (Allah) revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. It is believed Muhammad received the sacred words between 610 CE until his death in 632 CE (Sinai & Ringgren, 2023). The Qur'an is originally written in Arabic, which through a translation of the book can lead to multiple interpretations through the context of who is interpreting the text, their goals from these

religious teachings and how other people outside of the religion dissects the religious texts. It can also lead to different interpretations of the text to the people who understand the original Arabic text, as the words used can have different interpretations based on the context of how, when and why the text was written, and the discourse and social practices surrounding the interpreter(s) of the text. I will give some examples of how the religious understanding of the Qur'an is based on context and interpretation in this chapter, and why it is important to understand the difference between following a religion and following a religious ideology.

A text, according to Sunderland (2002), extends beyond the written and spoken language, by looking at the social practices and actions in how the text was produced and how it is read or heard by the recipient of the text (Sunderland & Litosseliti, 2002, p. 12). Sunderland does however, make a distinction between text and discourse, as *"most texts are not 'pure' reflections on single discourses"*, meaning that the meaning of a text can change and be appropriated by a person or a group's interpretation (Sunderland & Litosseliti, 2002, p. 14). A text can be interpreted in unlimited ways based on the meaning which the reader gives as a response, as Sunderland (2002) writes: *"[...] some will like it, some will not; some will interpret it the way the writer perhaps intended and hopes, while others will not"* (Sunderland & Litosseliti, 2002, p. 17). The context in how a text is produced, read and interpreted however, is more related to discursive practices. The context looks at the circumstances and social practices surrounding the text, and how these situations can shape the meaning of the text. Gender relations and cultural assumptions and understandings, and their relations to *ethnicity, age, class, disability and sexual identity* (Sunderland & Litosseliti, 2002, p. 15) are important contextual factors to how a text is interpreted. Example, Muslim men living in more egalitarian societies or communities could interpret the gender roles in the Qur'an as more equal than Muslim men living in less egalitarian societies or communities, where traditional gender roles are more prominent or forced. Through this understanding of textual context and interpretation, I will now look at some verses of the Qur'an, how they are interpreted in different ways by ISIS and muslim sources.

*Unbelievers*

The Yazidis were targeted by ISIS because of their religion and culture, being seen as infidels and unbelievers because they did not follow the Sunni Islamic faith. In interviews with former Yazidi sex slaves through new networks BBC News (2015) and CNN (2016), the women talk about how their religion was the reason for the attack on their people.

> *"We were raped up to five times a day. The emirs said we had to become Muslim and we must get rid of our religion because we are infidels. And they said that our religion is unfit for human beings and only fit for animals. They said that if we refused to become Muslim they would kill us. They immediately killed the older men who refused to become Muslim by beheading them in the street"* (BBC News, 2015).
>
> *"He would beat us and punish us. He would tell us that Yazidis were kuffars, unbelievers. Things like that. And his children, his daughters and sons would taunt us. They would say you are dirty. You are Yazidis. You are unbelievers"* (CNN, 2016).

These recollections of events by the women shows a discursive context to how Yazidi's are perceived by the followers of the Islamic State, being perceived as dirty, animalistic and unbelievers. If they do not convert, they will be killed or be forced into sexual slavery, based on them being "unbelievers" of the Islamic faith. What are *unbelievers*, according to the Qur'an?

*Unbelievers* are the people who are not followers of the Islamic faith, who do not believe in the words of God (Allah). The relationship between believers and unbelievers are explained in Surah 60 in the Qur'an, where we get background information about how the Muslims were driven out of their homes based on their faith by the unbelievers:

> "*God only forbids you to turn in friendship towards those who fight against you because of your faith, and drive you out of your homes, and help others to drive you out (60:9)*" (Salahi, 2020, p. 366).

The surah does not show a constant war between the believers and the unbelievers, as there is a possibility to live together peacefully unless the unbelievers choose to go to war against the believers. As Salahi (2020) explains:

> "*The surah makes it clear that friendship can be maintained with unbelievers who are at peace with the Muslim community. It is only when unbelievers are hostile and go to war against Muslims that such friendship cannot be permitted*" (Salahi, 2020, p. 365).
>
> "*God does not forbid you to deal kindly and with full equity with those who do not fight you on account of your faith, nor drive you out of your homes (60: 8)* (Salahi, 2020, p. 366).

The surah shows how the unbelievers will test your faith, by trickery or by using force, and if a person (example a migrant) comes from unbelievers but is able to show their devotion to God, they are welcomed as believers, as God is *all-forgiving and merciful*.

> "I*f they get the better of you, they will remain your enemies and stretch out their hands and tongues to you with evil. They dearly wish to see you unbelievers (60:2)*" (Salahi, 2020, p. 365).
>
> "*Our Lord! Do not make us a test for the unbelievers. Forgive us Lord. You are the Almighty, the Wise (60:5)* (Salahi, 2020, p. 366).
>
> "*Believers! When believing women come to you as migrants, test them. God knows best their faith. If you ascertain that they are believers, do not send them back to the unbelievers" (60:10)* (Salahi, 2020, p. 366).

From this surah, there is an established relationship between the believers and unbelievers, where a peaceful relationship is established through being respectful of the other people's faith, by not using violence (war) and forcing them out of their homes.

A more violent approach towards unbelievers is discussed in surah 9, although here it is also important to know some historical information related to when the Qur'an was written. Salahi (2020) writes:

> *"This surah was revealed in the ninth year of the Madinah period when the Muslim state had become well established, with most Arabian tribes flocking towards Islam. It begins with a declaration giving a four-month notice of termination for all indefinite treaties the Muslim state held with Arabian tribes, during which people had to define their attitude towards Islam, either accepting it or leaving it to live somewhere else"* (Salahi, 2020, p. 112)

The historical background of the text is important to acknowledge when reading the parts of the surah which relates to violence against the unbelievers:

> *"When these months of grace are over, slay the idolaters [Arabian tribes, unbelievers] wherever you find them, and take them captive, besiege them, and lie in wait for them at every conceivable place. Yet if they should repent, take to prayer and pay the zakat [Islamic charity], let them go their way. For God is much-forgiving, ever-merciful (9:5)* (Salahi, 2020, p. 113).

More information about the relationship between the Muslims and the Arabian tribes/idolaters are given in the text, giving context to why waging war against the unbelievers was the action taken. The surah tells us how the idolaters have not respected their agreements, attacked the Muslims, broken their promises and driven people from their homes:

*"[...] they will respect neither agreement with you, nor obligation of honour towards you? They try to please you with what they say, while at heart they remain adamantly hostile" (9: 8)* (Salahi, 2020, p. 113).

*"They barter away God's revelations for a paltry price and debar others from His path. Evil indeed is what they do" (9:9)* (Salahi, 2020, p. 113).

*"They respect neither agreement nor obligation of honour with regard to any believer. Those indeed are the aggressors" (9:10)* (Salahi, 2020, p. 113).

*"But if they break their pledges after having concluded a treaty with you, and revile your religion, then fight these archetypes of faithlessness who have no [respect for a] binding pledge, so that they may desist" (9:12)* (Salahi, 2020, p. 113).

*"Believers, some of the rabbis and monks wrongfully devour people's property and turn people away from God's path. To those who hoard up gold and silver and so not spend them in God's cause, give them the news of a painful suffering" (9: 34)* (Salahi, 2020, p. 115).

The surah is mentioned in the Sharia Law in the chapter on state affairs, under treaties. There is no historical context to how the surah is recited in the Sharia law, which makes the surah seem more violent towards all unbelievers of the Islamic faith:

> *"An ultimatum is herein issued from Allah and His messenger to the idol worshipers who enter into a treaty with you. So go about in the land for four months and know that you cannot weaken Allah and that Allah will bring disgrace to the unbelievers. And an announcement from Allah and His Messenger to the people on the day of the greater pilgrimage that Allah and His Messenger are free from liability to the idolaters; therefore if you repent, it will be better for you, and if you turn back, then know that you will not weaken Allah; and announce painful punishment to those who disbelieve. Except those of the idolaters with whom you made an agreement, then they have not failed you in anything and have not backed up any one against you, so fulfil their agreement to the end of their term; surely Allah loves those who are careful (of their duty)"* (Islamic-Laws, n.d., p. 18).

Without the historical context of the surah, there is no context in the Sharia of the relationship between the believers and the unbelievers and the treaty between them. The Muslims in the Madinah period waged war against the Arabic tribes because they did not respect their treaties and their religion. When reading how the surah is recited in the Sharia law, it can be interpreted as making a treaty against all unbelievers, and punishing those who do not agree to their terms. The text is also clearly stating how Allah is the one to bring disgrace on the unbelievers, not the Muslims. The surah does not advocate for violence against all

unbelievers, only the aggressors. The Yazidi population did not sign any treaty, nor were aggressors towards ISIS or the Islamic faith. According to the Qur'an, the Yaizidi's were peaceful unbelievers, which is not a threat to the Islamic faith according to surah 60.

*Jihad*

The original, Islamic meaning and context behind jihad has been misconstructed and misunderstood because of an extremist interpretation of this holy war in the Qur'an by terrorist organisations such as ISIS, or through its use to wage war against non-Muslims for political reasons throughout history. The concept of jihad has multiple interpretations, but put in simple terms through a definition by Britannica (2023) , the context of jihad, "*in the religious and ethical realm, primarily refers to the human struggle to promote what is right and to prevent what is wrong"* (Afsaruddin, 2023). As mentioned earlier when talking about unbelievers, the muslims did not wage war against the unbelievers who were peaceful, understanding and offered their friendship. It was the unbelievers who showed aggression towards them because of their faith, did not keep their promises and drove them out of their homes who the muslims are allowed to fight in the name of Allah. This is written in Surah 22:

> *Permission to fight is given to those against whom war is waged, because they have been wronged. Most certainly, God has the power to grant them victory. These are the ones who have been driven out of their homelands against all right for no other reason than their saying, 'Our Lord is God!' (22:39-40)* (Salahi, 2020, p. 209).

The context of when the text was written is important to acknowledge again, as the text was written in the Medinah period as mentioned earlier, where the Muslims were the target of faith-based discrimination and violence. It is only when followers of the Islamic faith is met with aggression when the Qur'an says violence is accepted, and they are not to be the aggressors of the conflict:

> *"Fight for the cause of God those who wage war against you, but do not commit aggression. Indeed, God does not love aggressors. Slay them wherever you may come upon them, and drive them away from wherever they drove you away, for oppression is even worse than killing. Do not fight them near the Sacred Mosque unless they fight you there first. Should they fight you, then kill them. Such is the reward for the unbelievers" (2: 190-91)* (Salahi, 2020, p. 18).

The definition of jihad being about the human struggle to promote what is right and prevent what is wrong is most often seen by Muslims as an internal struggle of their faith, not just an

external one through violent forces. Jihad through warfare is known as jihad al-Sayf, while the internal jihad is known as jihad al-Nafs. Al-Islam describes jihad al-Nafs as:
*"the struggle against evil ideas, desires and powers of lust, anger, and insatiable imagination, placing all of them under the dictates of reason and faith in obedience to God's commands, and finally, purging all satanic ideas and influences from one's soul. This struggle is considered as the major struggle (al-jihad al-akbar) as it is much more difficult than fighting in the battlefield, for in the struggle against the self, one has to constantly battle enemies that are hosted inside his own existence"* (Al-Islam, n.d.).
The inner jihad is about your inner battle to keep doing the righteous deeds required by God, and not fall victim to distractions such as lust, anger, desire and power that lead you away from your faith.

> *"By the soul and its moulding and inspiration with knowledge of wickedness and righteousness. Successful is the one who keeps it pure, and ruined is the one who corrupts it (91: 7-10)* (Salahi, 2020, p. 418).
>
> *"Who could be more wicked than one who invents lies against God, or denies the truth when it reaches him? Is not Hell the proper abode for the unbelievers? Bus as for those who strive hard in Our cause, We shall most certainly guide them to paths that lead unto Us. God is indeed with those who do good" (29: 68-69)* (Salahi, 2020, p. 253).
>
> *"Fight, then, in God's cause, since you are responsible only for your own self, and encourage the believers" (4:84)* (Salahi, 2020, p. 55).
>
> *"Indeed man's soul does incite him to evil, except for those upon whom God has bestowed His mercy" (12:53)* (Salahi, 2020, p. 146)

Through looking at the concept of jihad and how the concept of a holy war is depicted in the Qur'an, ISIS's attack on the Yazidi population can not be justified through the Islamic description of jihad, as the Yazidis have not threatened the Muslim population, used violence or been the aggressors in this conflict. The ISIS fighters targeted the Yazidis because of their lust for power, and took the Yazidi women as sex slaves because of their own personal desires, going against the concept of jihad al-Nafs, opposing Allah. Their distraction for lust and desire is clearly states in the interview with an ISIS fighter in an interview with the news network Arab News (2017), when he was asked if ISIS asked him to rape the women and he says: *"Of course, they didn't. But you know, as a young man, I needed this (to fulfil my desire). We are young men and we need it"* (Arab News, 2017). There is no mention about Allah, who he claims to fight for, in his reasoning behind his actions.

## Discourse of gender and sexuality

In her autobiography, Nadia Murad tells the story about the day she was captured, and she and other Yazidi women were forced on a bus going to Mosul. She tells how she and the other women were scared, their bodies being touched and used by ISIS fighter Abu Batat, and did not know what fate awaited them. When Murad complained about their treatment, the fate of the women were revealed by ISIS fighter Nafah (Murad, 2017, p. 82):

*Nafah was a terrorist, but didn't ISIS have rules about how the women were treated? Surely if they considered themselves to be good Muslims, they would object to the way that Abu Batat was abusing us. "You brought us here, on this bus. You made us come, we had no choice, and this man"—I pointed at Abu Batat, my hand shaking out of fear—"he has been putting his hand on our breasts the entire time. He's been grabbing us, and he won't leave us alone!" [...] "What do you think you are here for?" he said to me,[...] "Honestly, don't you know?"Abu Batat walked over to where Nafah stood and grabbed my neck, pushing my head against the seat and pointing his gun at my forehead. [...] "I don't know what you thought we had taken you for," he said. "But you have no choice. You are here to be sabaya, and you will do exactly what we say. And if any of you scream again, trust me, things will be even worse for you." [...] When ISIS took over Sinjar and began kidnapping Yazidis, they called their human spoils sabaya (sabiyya is singular), referring to the young women they would buy and sell as sex slaves. This was part of their plan for us, sourced from an interpretation of the Koran that had long been banned by the world's Muslim communities, and written into the fatwas and pamphlets ISIS made official before they attacked Sinjar. Yazidi girls were considered infidels, and according to the militants' interpretation of the Koran, raping a slave is not a sin.*

The role gender plays in the context of why the Yazidi women were taken by hard power tactics and forced into new roles as *sabaya's* are important, as their fate was not just determined by their cultural background, but also the social institutions formed around the concept of gender, and the discourse surrounding gender roles. In systems consisting of traditional gender roles, there is a clear distinction between the masculine and feminine roles, shaping the social norms and how we respond to these gendered structures. These gender role structures often gets more visible in areas of war and conflict, where there is a clear distinction between the masculine warrior and the feminine victim, as stated by Ahram:

*"In periods of war and crisis, states tend to adopt hyper-masculine characteristics: they use violence to defend territory, lives and honour. Men are not only the primary implementers of violence, but also the main decision-makers in matters of state policy pertaining to military and security affairs. Women are cast in the opposite role, as 'beautiful souls': innocents, embodying peace and purity"* (Ahram, 2015, p. 58).

The men who chose to join ISIS by their own will, did not only join because of their Islamic religion, they joined because of their constructed ideas around what masculinity is, where men fight, while the women are the ones to be protected, and often used as a prize for their bravery. Murad (2017) writes: *ISIS planned it all: how they would come into our homes, what made a girl more or less valuable, which militants deserved a sabiyya as incentive and which should pay. They even discussed sabaya in their glossy propaganda magazine, Dabiq, in an attempt to draw new recruits* (Murad, 2017, p. 92). An example of men who were recruited to ISIS on the background of getting *Sabayas* can be seen in the video posted by BBC News, of ISIS fighters discussing prizes, buying and selling their Yazidi sex slaves to other soldiers. In the video, the men shout: *"With the permission of Allah, everyone gets a share. I hope a Jihadi will give me one as a gift"*, and *"You want a Yazidi slave? Can you prove to her that you are a man?"* (BBC News, 2015). The men are also discussing what makes a girl more or less valuable, saying: *"The price varies, if she has blue eyes… Check her! Check her teeth!"* (BBC News, 2015).

Murad mentions the ISIS propaganda magazine Dabiq, where rules regarding *sabayas* were written. The magazine has been banned, and I could not trace the original list of rules. The Human Rights Watch has posted an excerpt of a pamphlet issued by ISIS, with questions and answers relating to the ownership of *sabayas* (Roth, 2015). When reading their list of rules and comparing it to the experiences of the Yazidi women, and the confessions of ISIS fighters, it became clear that the men fighting in the name of Islam do not follow the actual religious scriptures, and do not follow their own written rules. The men use sexual violence, according to Ahram (2015), *"as a means of exerting power over entire populations"*, and *"uses sexual violence to construct a distinctive form of hyper-masculine Islamic State. Its hyper-masculinity is intertwined with Sunni fundementalist, supremacist ideology, and the attendant notion of ethno-sectarian hierarchy. Sexual violence helps to subordinate and degrade [...] Yazidis, [...] and other groups ISIS deems enemies, infidels and apostates. Placed into sexual slavery, captured women and girls become, in effect, breeding stock. Sexual violence also reinforces bonds among Sunni Muslims, turning the motley crew of true believers, opportunists, thugs and outright sociopaths into networks that form the upper*

*levels of the embryonic Islamic State"* (Ahram, 2015, p. 59). The structure of the Islamic State is then, not made out of men who fight for God, but of men who fight for their own egocentric, masculine goals, using the Qur'an as a justification for their actions. Following are examples of ISIS straying away from their own rules and the Islamic scriptures.

Question five asks: *Is it permissible to have intercourse with a female captive immediately after taking possession [of her]? The answer: If she is a virgin, he [her master] can have intercourse with her immediately after taking possession of her. However, if she isn't, her uterus must be purified [first]….* (Roth, 2015). In the interview with Yazidi woman Halida by the National Post (2016), she tells how ISIS *"took girls, as young as 9 or 10, outside and raped them and then brought them back to the hall"* (National Post, 2016). Their rule states that the men are allowed to have intercourse with the female captives after taking possession of her, but in some cases, the men had intercourse with the girls without the girls officially in their possession. Nadia Murad mentions in her book that she was on her period the day she was captured, and was taken as a sex slave by a man named Hajji Salman. She was still a virgin, so he could according to their rules engage in intercourse, as Nadia states: "*The Islamic State manual does not outlaw sex with sabaya who are menstruating, but it does say that the captor should wait for his slave to finish her menstrual cycle before having sex with her, to be certain that she is not pregnant"* (Murad, 2017, p. 98). Salman tells Murad: *"When I come back, I don't care if you have your period," he said after a moment. "I promise you, I will come to you."That's how he put it: "I will come to you."* (Murad, 2017, p. 105). These examples show that it is the men who are always in control of their sexual acts, and the women have no control of their own bodies, even when the men are supposed to follow a set of rules they created. The men are always in control, and the women are fixed as sexual vessels for the men. As Ahram (2015) writes: *"The bodies of the conquered are, in effect, expropriated as sexual and breeding stock"* (Ahram, 2015, p. 67).

## Sexuality, power and knowledge

### *Foucault: Power and knowledge*

Who creates the knowledge and who has the power is an important question in the French philosopher and political theorist Michel Foucault's theory on power and knowledge. Foucault challenges the idea of power and knowledge being separate entities, especially after the industrial revolution in the nineteenth century. Foucault saw a shift in political practice

from a *"display of power as a spectacle"*, like the monarchs, to a type of power displayed everywhere, more subtle, disciplinary and always keeping you alert (Rouse, 1994, p. 98). Foucault (1990) writes: *"At the beginning of the seventeenth century a certain frankness was still common [...]. Sexual practices had little need of secrecy, words were said without undue reticence, and things were done without too much concealment [...]. Codes regulating the coarse, the obscene, and the indecent were quite lax compared to those of the nineteenth century. [...]. But twilight soon fell upon this bright day, followed by the monotonous nights of the Victorian bourgeoisie. Sexuality was carefully confined; moved into the home"* (Foucault, p. 3). Foucault argues that power is not only practised through sovereign power, such as through laws, but is practised through social relations *"disseminated through more extensive social networks and did not transmit power in only one direction. [...]. They were instrumental to the production of various 'goods', such as knowledge, health, wealth and social cohesion"* (Rouse, 1994, p. 105). If social relations see a type of knowledge as legitimate, power is shaped through that type of knowledge. By using statistical measurements, epistemic knowledge is used as a disciplinary tool by different power relations, creating a homogenous social body which follows the normalised knowledge curve (Rouse, 1994, p. 101). The social norms practising these types of power relations and creating the knowledge is everywhere, not just in sovereign structures. They exist in schools and universities, in the workplace, in public places and in the home. The topic of sexuality relating to power and knowledge is important to Foucault, as these power and knowledge structures creates norms and rules around the topic of sex and sexuality, which constricts people from expressing their sexuality, which people are repressed sexually, who makes the decisions regarding sexuality, and who are the victims of these social relational structures.

In his book, The History of Sexuality, Foucault (1990) writes: "*We must not look for who has the power in the order of sexuality (men, adults, parents, doctors) and who is deprived of it (women, adolescents, children, patients); nor for who has the right to know and who is forced to remain ignorant. We must seek rather the pattern of the modification which the relationships of force imply by the very nature of their process. [...]. Relations of power-knowledge are not static forms of distribution, they are matrices of transformations. The nineteenth century grouping made up of the father, the mother, the educator, and the doctor, around the child and his sex, was subjected to constant modifications, constant shifts"* (Foucault, 1990, p. 99). The discourse around sex and sexuality is not only defined by who is dominating and who is victimised. It is also defined by an *extortion of truth, appearing historically and in specific places* (Foucault, 1990, p. 97). A child's sex and sexuality is

closely monitored since birth, from the gendered expectations and social structures relating to their gender. Example, in some countries, babies of the female sex are unwanted because of structures making males more economically desirable. Shifts around the power and knowledge around sex and sexuality are possible in times of change, where the existing gendered structures are not desirable.

In the Yazidi culture, it is prohibited to marry or participate in sexual relations with someone outside of the Yazidi culture, and one is no longer considered a Yazidi if this occurs. In her book, Murad (2017) writes: *"ISIS knew how devastating it was for an unmarried Yazidi girl to convert to Islam and lose her virginity, and they used our worst fears—that our community and religious leaders wouldn't welcome us back—against us. "Try to escape, it doesn't matter," Hajji Salman would tell me. 'Even if you make it home, your father or your uncle will kill you. You're no longer a virgin, and you are Muslim!"*. (Murad, 2017, p. 107). Before the genocide, a Yazidi who tried to return to their community after marrying or engage in sexual contact with someone outside of their caste/religion would be excluded from their community (Kizilhan, 2019, p. 14). The genocide has opened the community to shift their traditional, conservative approach to a more humane approach, welcoming the women back and help them through the trauma. Still the same humane treatment is not awarded to the children born through the rape of the Yazidi women, as many were not welcomed into the Yazidi community (Kizilhan, 2019, p. 14). The shift in the Yazidi community shows how some norms around the social relations surrounding sex and sexuality can change in times of crisis, but some norms are not, and decides the fate of the children born from an act of rape from the time of conception.

*Biopower*

Another type of power proposed by Foucault was the act of using biopower, which is the policing over the physical body and the population. Foucault (1990) writes: *"During the classical period, there was a rapid development of various disciplines- universities, secondary schools, barracks, workshops; there was also the emergence, in the field of political practices and economic observation, of the problems of birthrate, public health, housing, and migration. Hence there was an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations, marking the beginning of an era of 'biopower'"* (Foucault, 1990, p. 140). Biopower is practised through acts, laws, or policies which restricts the access or control over one's ability to give life or take life, as *"the ancient right to take life or let live was replaced by a power to foster life or disallow it*

*to the point of death"* (Foucault, 1990, p. 138). A woman's access to birth control or having an abortion is decided by the power structures who either put these systems in place, prohibit them through laws or force, or socal relations which decides her power in making decisions.

The purpose of rape by the Islamic State was not just to punish the Yazidi women for being non-believers and infidels, it was used as a tool of biopower to assert control over the Yazidi women's body, using the act of sex to forcefully remove them from their community and faith and make them belong to the Islamic State and their religion. As a Yazidi woman tells in a CNN (2016) interview: *"He told us, we beat you because you ran away from us. We chose to convert you to our religion. We chose you. You belong to the Islamic State"* (CNN, 2016). In Islamic faith, the treatment of slaves is dealt with through kindness and compassion, and must be seen as an equal. This is shown in Sunnah 49, chapter 15: *"I saw Abu Dhar Al-Ghifari wearing a cloak, and his slave, too, was wearing a cloak. We asked him about that (i.e. how both were wearing similar cloaks). He replied, "Once I abused a man and he complained of me to the Prophet. The Prophet asked me, 'Did you abuse him by slighting his mother?' He added, 'Your slaves are your brethren upon whom Allah has given you authority. So, if one has one's brethren under one's control, one should feed them with the like of what one eats and clothe them with the like of what one wears. You should not overburden them with what they cannot bear, and if you do so, help them (in their hard job)"* (Sunnah, n.d.). ISIS still used regular beatings as a way to exert power over the Yazidi women and their bodies, and through their own ideological interpretation of the Qur'an and Islamic writing, allowed beating and punishing their female slaves. The rules in their pamphlet states: *"It is permissible to beat the female slave as a [form of] darb ta'deeb [disciplinary beating], [but] it is forbidden to [use] darb al-takseer [literally, breaking beating], [darb] al-tashaffi [beating for the purpose of achieving gratification], or [darb] al-ta'dheeb [torture beating]. Further, it is forbidden to hit the face"* (Roth, 2015). Even if their own rules state they are not allowed to hit the woman's face, the ISIS fighters still perform this type of punishment, as retold by the Yazidi woman in the CNN (2016) interview: "He hit me with a garden hose and belt. Then he slapped my face and my nose bled" (CNN, 2016). By using violence towards the Yazidi sex slaves and taking control over their bodies through rape and forced impregnation as a tool of genocide, ISIS is using biopower as a tool to gain political, religious and territorial power over the Yazidi population, not as a way to further their religious message and faith.

*Female sexual agency*

The discourse around female sexuality often determines a woman's or girl's agency in sexual relations and pratice, her role and how much power she has over her sexuality. The virginity of a woman is a topic which is generally more discussed and regulated than the virginity of a man. When a woman practice sex for the first time, the discourse is often how she is giving up something, a part of herself, for the man, leaving a blood-stain behind as evidence of her lost innocence, as told by Murad: *"As early as they could, the bride's girlfriends visited her to get the whole story of that first night. They giggled, examining the bed-sheet, stained with a little telltale blood"* (Murad, 2017, p. 60). When the Yazidi women were taken captive, their virginity was a present topic in how much their worth was according to the ISIS fighters, if they were spoiled or desirable. *"'They are virgins, right?' they asked a guard, who nodded and said, 'Of course!' like a shopkeeper taking pride in his product. Some girls told me they had been checked by a doctor to make sure they weren't lying about their virginity, while others, like me, had only been asked. A few insisted that in fact they were not virgins, that they were spoiled, thinking it would make them less desirable, but the militants could tell they were lying. 'They are so young, and they are Yazidi,' they said. 'No Yazidi girl would have sex unless she was married'"* (Murad, 2017, p. 91). The control around female sexuality is not just a problem of war and conflict in general, but also linked to the gendered discourse surrounding male and female sexuality.

Laura Sjoberg writes: *"Wartime sexual violence does not happen just to women, and it is not perpetuated just by men- but it is gendered, sexual and violent. [...]. Organized sexual violence in conflict communicates a gendere message- the humiliation of a group, state, or nation's women is 'a metaphor for national humiliation… as well as a tactic of war used to symbolically prove the superiority of one's national group' "* (Sjoberg, 2015, p. 441). The discourse and language used by ISIS and its members perpetuate a view surrounding male dominance of sexual relations, where the women are sold as objects for sexual pleasure to men they have no sexual attraction or agency over, and used as sexual vessels for ISIS to establish their power. As Yazidi woman Halida says in a National Post (2016) interview: *"Daesh came to this hall and selected girls. They forced us to show our bodies so they could take pictures. They took girls, as young as 9 or 10, outside and raped them and then brought them back to the hall. Five sheiks and 50 fighters came and selected the beautiful girls from the room. We were bought and sold like a car, a mobile phone, or an air conditioner"* (National Post, 2016). According to ISIS's rules and discourse related to virginity and female sexuality, a woman's virginity is something for them to possess, and if the woman is not a virgin, she must be 'purified' first before her owner can have 'intercourse' with her. This

discourse establishes a narrative where if the woman has willingly engaged in sexual relations by her own agency, she is considered 'impure'. *"If she is a virgin, he [her master] can have intercourse with her immediately after taking possession of her. However, if she isn't, her uterus must be purified [first]…."* (Roth, 2015). By looking at the gendered discourse surrounding female sexuality, the sexual violence perpetuated against the women and girls were not just based on their cultural and religious background in this conflict, but also on the language surrounding female sexuality, where women are giving or taking away their virginity and rights to bodily autonomy to their male partner, or owner. The topic of female sexuality will be further explored through the feminist analysis.

## Feminist theory: Gendered power structures leading to sexual violence and loss of sexual agency and autonomy

Through the use of feminist theory in the following analysis, the roles of power and gender institutions are central to explain why the Yazidi women were being punished by ISIS because of their faith and culture through the use of sexual violence and coercion. I will look at the role of gendered power institutions, in how the representation of gender shapes the outcome of female vulnerability. The masculine power structures in the Islamic State leading to sexual violence and sexual coercion, and the social structures leading to women losing agency of their own sexuality and sexual rights.

### Gender and power: The role of gendered power institutions

Gendered representations are important aspects to how women and girls are discussed and defined in a society. A society is made up of institutions, which shapes our reality and understanding of the world around us. The four main institutions are family, government, religion and education (Saylor Academy, n.d.). I would also argue that the media is another important institution in shaping gender representations. How gender is represented through these institutions are important in shaping gender relations, structures and knowledge. Gendered representations and structures are everywhere, from how we dress, to how women and men are victimised by different gendered standards in war and conflict. Sjoberg (2015) writes: *"Feminists have argued that gender dynamics do not happen only to people or within*

*institutions, but also among institutions, among states, and between different sorts of actors in global politics"* (Sjoberg, 2015, p. 445). War and conflict is often represented through a traditionally masculine narrative of traits, such as *strength, aggression, autonomy, stoicism, bravery, and protectiveness* (Sjoberg, 2015, p. 443-44). In this traditional narrative, women, or the feminine, have no place on the battleground as fighters, as they are the ones to be protected by the male soldiers. Sjoberg (2015) discusses how women are represented in war and conflict, their "feminised" role as peacekeepers and their agency in participating in war and conflict.

*"Hunt's claim that women's integration in the security sector can "prevent violent conflict, stop war, and sustain peace in fragile regions"), and have been justified on various grounds, including but not limited to understanding women as more peaceful because they are physically weaker, linking motherhood and pacifism, and seeing women as naturally more caring than men"* (Sjoberg, 2015, p. 442).

*"By "gendered world," feminists argue that women experience gendered expectations of passivity, peacefulness, care labour, and dependency and live with the constrained resources and opportunities associated with femininity—including less access to income, fewer freedoms, fewer rights, less access to government, and less access to personal autonomy. It is for those reasons that women tend to engage in less violence than men do"* (Sjoberg, 2015, p. 442).

These gendered representations in war and conflicts make women more passive participants than men because of gendered expectations, systems and structures around being a soldier. The gendered view of women as peaceful, motherly figures gives them less autonomy to fight back against an enemy, waiting for the masculine structures to protect them. Murad (2017) writes: *"Some of my neighbors complained that the Americans had forgotten about us, and they worried that without contact with them, Yazidis would be unprotected"* (Murad, 2017, p. 35). After the American soldiers stopped protecting the Yazidis, they were reliant on the Kurdish military forces, the peshmerga, for their protection. The peshmerga offered no military training or weapons to the Yazidi population to defend themselves, with some reports saying that they removed the Yazidis weapons and prevented them from leaving Sinjar under their protection (Ochab, 2017). Murad (2017) writes: *"Some people, including a few of my brothers, thought we should be allowed to protect ourselves. They wanted to man the checkpoints, and Ahmed Jasso's brother Naif tried to convince Kurdish authorities to let him form a Yazidi peshmerga unit, but he was ignored. No one offered to train the Yazidi men or encourage them to join the fight against the terrorists. The*

*peshmerga assured us that as long as they were there, we had nothing to worry about, and that they were as determined to protect Yazidis as they were the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan"* (Murad, 2017, p. 14). The Yazidi men were also victims of this gendered power institution of war, as the military forces see themselves through the masculine lens of being the protectors, not the providers. When ISIS came to Sinjar during August of 2014, the only options left for the Yazidis was to flee up the mountain, or surrender as they had no protection, weapons or military training. By looking at Sjoberg's list of gendered expectations in war and conflict, the Yazidis were subjected to the female gendered expectations as peaceful, dependent, less access to personal autonomy and constrained resources.

After the genocide, Yazidi women chose to fight back against the Islamic State through military force in Sinjar, to have agency and determination in the conflict, no longer being the victims. *"The most important and sensitive position – facing Isis – is in the hands of women," he says. "Women are always the victim: in the West, in the East, in the Middle East." But here, "each one has a reason to fight and survive. They know they're deciding their own life."* (Moroz, 2015). Former Yazidi slaves like Nadia Murad are speaking up in political spaces such as the United Nations, speaking up for the women who are victims of war and bringing the human rights violations of gendered power structures in war and conflict to the forefront. Sjoberg (2015) writes: *"Enloe was asking why women are absent from the stories told of the "important" details about war and conflict in global politics. If half of the world's population is women, why are they so conspicuously absent from conversations about how wars happen, what causes them, and what their consequences are?"* (Sjoberg, 2015, p. 437). When female voices are silenced, there is less discussion around the female victims of war, but also around how women are active participants. During her captivity, Murad met her captors mother, who participated in treating her as a sexual slave, which is retold during an episode when Morteja, her captor's guard, tried to touch her: *"Leave her alone," she said to Morteja, "she doesn't belong to you." And Morteja left the room, hanging his head in shame like a child. "She's a kafir," his mother said to him as he left, then scowled at me. "And she belongs to Hajji Salman."* (Murad, 2017, p. 103). Murad recollects how she did not understand how a woman could support the acts of the Islamic State, as the men are given the freedom and rights, while the women's rights are taken away by their religious ideology. "*Under ISIS, women were erased from public life. Men joined it for obvious reasons—they wanted money, power, and sex. [...]. I couldn't understand, though, why a woman would join the jihadists and openly celebrate the enslavement of girls the way Morteja's mother did. Any woman in Iraq, no matter her religion, had to struggle for*

*everything. Seats in parliament, reproductive rights, positions at universities—all these were the results of long battles. Men were content to stay in power, so power had to be taken from them by strong women* (Murad, 2017, p. 101). Holding women accountable for their actions in participating in the violent acts against Yazidi women and girls brings forward the intersectionality of sexual violence, as some women are victims of patriarchal power structures while other women actively supports and participates in it. One recent example of a woman being prosecuted for her part in the sexual violence happened in Germany. A wife of an IS fighter, Jennifer Wenisch, was sentenced to jail in 2021 because of her role in the death of a five year old Yazidi slave in 2015, who died after being chained up in the scorching sun (Greenall, 2023).

Silencing female voices in war and conflict perpetuates the masculine power institutions, not only silencing female victims, but also stops female perpetrators of violence against women being prosecuted. Through breaching these gendered expectations of only being seen as victims of war and speaking up and fighting back, Yazidi women like Nadia Murad bring new information about what happens during war behind closed doors, in the home where the women are. Sjoberg (2015) writes: *"When we look for women in the conflict in Libya, we see that the conflict reached into places where we do not generally think of wars: homes, bedrooms, schools, cars, hotels—spaces we traditionally understand as private. For women, conflicts often start long before "war breaks out" (as they battle increasing domestic violence and/or economic austerity) and end long after "peace breaks out" (as they deal with familial destruction, infrastructural damage, and long-term care labour). This leads feminist scholars to hold a broader definition of war and conflict than many scholars who fail to take account of gender—contextualizing it broadly in a spectrum of violence"* (Sjoberg, 2015, p 446). Even though the main phase of the Iraq war is over in terms of military conflict, the war is still present behind closed doors as thousands of Yazidi women are missing. By giving the women a voice, the hidden side of war and conflicts are brought forward, and a deeper understanding of the gendered institutions leading to gendered and sexual violence can be reached.

## Sexual violence and sexual coercion

The Qur'an says: *"Do not force your maids to prostitution when they desire to preserve their chastity, in order to make some worldly gain. If anyone should force them, then*

*after they have been compelled, God will be much-forgiving, ever-merciful" (24:33)* (Salahi, 2019, p. 220). The maids in the context of this Surah is referring to the female slaves, where the owner is not allowed to force the slave to perform sexual acts if they wish to remain pure (keep their chastity). If the women are forced, then God will forgive the women, not the perpetrator of the sexual act. Here, the Qur'an looks at the issue of sexual violence in the topic of slavery and prostitution, where the owner choose to violate the slave's boundaries and wishes related to sexual intercourse. In their pamphlet, ISIS answers if it is permissible to have intercourse with a female captive. The answer refers back to the Qur'an, saying: *It is permissible to have sexual intercourse with the female captive. Allah the almighty said: "[Successful are the believers] who guard their chastity, except from their wives or (the captives and slaves) that their right hands possess, for then they are free from blame [Koran 23:5–6]."* (Roth, 2015). The Qur'an says the man is allowed to participate in intercourse with his female captive/slave, but does not say that the man has a right to force the female captive to participate in sexual acts, in other words, rape. The act of rape is highly illegal in Islam, where the punishment for rape is comparable to the punishment for adultery, known in the Qur'an as *zina*. Zina is described as *sexual intercourse between a man and a woman without the legal relationship of husband and wife existing between them* (Islamicstudies, n.d.). The punishment for zina in the Qur'an states *"flog each of them with a hundred stripes" (24:2)* (Salahi, 2019, p. 218). But zina is consentual sexual relations between two people. Rape is referred to as *ightisab*, which is a coercive form of zina (Al Hakam, 2022).

The surah ISIS refers to as them being permissible of having intercourse with their female captives does not include the next sentence, which adds further context. The surah states: *"[successful shall be the believers] who refrain from sex except with those joined to them in marriage, or those whom they rightfully possess- for then, they are free of all blame,* ***whereas those who seek to go beyond that [limit] are indeed transgressors****" (23:5-7)* (Salahi, 2019, p. 212). The surah states that men are permitted to keep their sexual activity within limits, by being able to have sexual relations with their wife or the (willing) female slave, and control their sexual urges. If he moves outside of those limits, he is a transgressor, and should be punished. In the stories told in the interviews with Yazidi women and ISIS fighters in interviews conducted by the news networks BBC News (2015, 2017), National Post (2016) and Arab News (2017), there were multiple examples of the men not being able to control their sexual urges, and committed acts of *ightisab*, by physically forcing the women and girls to engage in sexual acts against their will.

*"I saw a man who was over 40 take a 10 year old girl. The girl was screaming. I'll never forget those screams, screaming for mum, "mama, mama". But we could do nothing"* (BBC News, 2017).

*"Daesh came to this hall and selected girls. They forced us to show our bodies so they could take pictures. They took girls, as young as 9 or 10, outside and raped them and then brought them back to the hall"* (National Post, 2016).

*"We raped women in several regions [...]". "Did Daesh ask you to do this?". "Of course they didn't. But you know, as a young man, I needed this (to fulfil my desire). We are young men and we need it"* (Arab News, 2017). The ISIS fighter in this interview admitted to raping over two hundred women.

*"Abu Muhammed said I had this girl when she was a virgin. I am bored of her now. I want another one. I was sold to Abu Abdullah who also raped me. He got bored of me after a few days"* (BBC News, 2015).

The act of rape is not just done by physical force, either through the use of violence during the sexual act, or by threatening the victim to perform sexual acts to avoid bodily harm. Rape also takes place through the act of coercion, where the victim is unwillingly consenting to the act in fear of receiving bodily harm or experience other traumatic events if they do not comply. Brownmiller discusses the act of coercion in rape, saying:

*"All rape is an exercise in power, but some rapists have an edge that is more than physical. They operate within an institutionalized setting that works to their advantage and in which a victim has little chance to redress her grievance. Rape in slavery and rape in wartime are two such examples. But rapists may also operate within an emotional setting or within a dependent relationship that provides a hierarchical, authoritarian structure of its own that weakens a victim's resistance, distorts her perspective and confounds her will"* (Brownmiller, 1975, p. 256).

During their enslavement, the Yazidi women were constantly touched without their permission, raped, sold like objects and told that they are powerless. After a traumatic event where their family were killed and they were kidnapped from their homes, the women were very vulnerable to coercion, as they had no protection and feared for their lives. They lost their sense of individuality and belonging by being forced from their religion and culture, into a system where they were seen as infidels and belonging to the Islamic State.

*"Yazidis are infidels, you know," Hajji Salman said. He spoke softly, almost in a whisper, but there was nothing gentle about him. "God wants us to convert you, and if we can't, then we can do what we like to you."* (Murad, 2017, p. 97).

*"She is your sabiyya now. Do with her what you like," [...] First, they took us from our homes and killed our men. Then they separated us from our mothers and sisters. Wherever we were, they reminded us that we were just property, there to be touched and abused, the way Abu Batat squeezed my breast as if he wanted to break it or Nafah put cigarettes out on my body. All of those violations were steps in the execution of our souls.Taking our religion from us was the cruelest. Leaving the courthouse, I felt empty. Who was I if I wasn't Yazidi?* (Murad, 2017, p. 100)

*"Was the photo for an ID?" I asked Hajji Salman."No," he replied. "They will use the photo to keep track of where you are and who you are with." [...] "And if you try to escape, they will print hundreds of copies of those photos with my name and phone number next to it and hang them at every checkpoint to make sure that you are returned to me. You will be returned to me."Of course, I believed him.* (Murad, 2017, p. 100).

Through these forceful acts of coercion, the women lose autonomy over their own body, and agency of their own decisions and actions surrounding their sexuality and sexual actions. The female body is represented as a tool for the male sexual pleasure and a reproductive vessel, for the men to use and own as they want. Women are not seen as independent sexual beings with their own sexual desires through the ideological interpretation of the Qur'an and Islamic texts by ISIS, as their interpretation is rooted in a masculine and patriarchal power structure where sexual violence is permitted.

## Controlling female sexuality: Women as reproductive vessels, not sexual beings

The concept and act of sex and sexuality is often discussed as a private matter, something which happens behind closed doors and between one self, two or multiple people. Although the conversations are more controlled and private, the gendered expectations and power dynamics are always present in how women and men are represented differently in their power and position related to sex. Wendy Brown discusses the politicisation of sex in her work "Where is the sex in political theory?". Brown (1987) writes: *"I have suggested that in the tradition of political theory, woman is sex and sex is woman. But what can this mean when, historically, women have had little control of their sexuality or any of the resources of life, and have been the objects of pervasive sexual violence? What are we to make of the seeming paradox that women are simultaneously vehicles and victims of sexual power- women are sex, and women are controlled through their sexuality? [...] women have been*

*viewed not as creatures of desire but only as creatures desired"* (Brown, 1987, p. 9). By this, Brown looks at the power dynamics in play when defining male and female sexuality, where the female is both defined as a sexual being which is directly tied to the act of sex and sexuality.

But although the women are defined as sexual beings, they are not in control of their own desires, as they are seen as sexual vessels to satisfy the male desire. The female body is, in turn, objectified as an object of desire and a reproductive vessel carrying the "male seed", as Aristotle put it (Brown, 1987, p. 6). Even if the men have been the main sexual actors who are actively engaging in and acting on their sexual desires, the women have been put in the position of the sexual actors and objectified as a sexual body. Brown writes: *"What does it mean to say that men have displaced sexuality onto women when it is men who have historically been the sexual "agents," the principal sexual actors? Here we must look anew at what it means to objectify something in a human being. Men cast their desire as object-related, external to themselves, and in the case of sexuality, the object is a body"* (Brown, 1987, p. 10). A woman's virtue is often tied to her body and sex, where beauty, chastity, shame and modesty are discussed topics of female virtues by philosophical thinkers such as Kant, Rousseau and Engels, and a man's virtue is tied to his nobility, in other words his character and rank outside of his body (Brown, 1987, p. 8).

The rules in the ISIS pamphlet states that the owner of a female slave is allowed to engage in intercourse with her. Through these rules, the women are not just seen as objects through social relations, it is also written down as a guideline that the female slave is an object of desire, a body to serve the men. Her body is also an object of punishment, which the man owns and can treat as he wishes if she does not follow his instructions, demands or submit to his sexual desires, as stated in question nineteen in ISIS's pamphlet on female slave ownership[1] (Roth, 2015). The forced sexual slavery was not just an act of fulfilling the men's sexual desires, as sex was also used as a punishment against the women. Murad tells the story of how she was sexually punished (raped) after being caught trying to escape jumping out the window.

[1] Question 19: Is it permissible to beat a female slave?

It is permissible to beat the female slave as a [form of] darb ta'deeb [disciplinary beating], [but] it is forbidden to [use] darb al-takseer [literally, breaking beating], [darb] al-tashaffĩ [beating for the purpose of achieving gratification], or [darb] al-ta'dheeb [torture beating]. Further, it is forbidden to hit the face (Roth, 2015)

"*The door opened, and Hajji Salman came in, carrying a whip in his hands. Screaming, I threw myself onto the bed and pulled a thick comforter over my entire body and my head, hiding the way a child hides. Salman stood beside the bed and without a word started beating me. [...] I had no choice. I lifted the blanket off and, with Salman still hovering over me holding the whip, slowly took off my clothes. When I was completely naked, I stood still, waiting for what he would do to me and crying silently. I assumed he would rape me, but instead, he started walking toward the door. "Nadia, I told you that if you tried to escape something really bad would happen to you," he said. [...] A moment later Morteja, Yahya, Hossam, and the three other guards walked in, staring at me. [..] As soon as I saw them, I understood what my punishment would be. Morteja was the first to come to the bed. I tried to stop him, but he was too strong. He pushed me down, and there was nothing I could do. After Morteja, another guard raped me"* (Murad, 2017, p. 115).

In this incident, there is a clear gendered power dimension based on sex and the objectification of the body. The Yazidi men were punished by death for their characters, where their value was tied to their religious and cultural roots, not their bodies. Women are not just punished because of their religion and culture, but also because of their sexualized bodies. The Yazidi women who escaped have described their captivity as the feeling of multiple deaths, as their agency and character was destroyed through the objectification, dehumanization and acts of rape. Yazidi woman Ekhlas answers when asked if she would go back to and live in Iraq in an interview with BBC News (2017): *"Yes, but how do I know the neighbour who once betrayed me and raped me won't come back and rape my daughters? You probably think I am strong as a rock, but I want you to know I am wounded inside. I have my pain and it's like a hundred deaths"* (BBC News, 2017). Often, the prospect of death was a better outcome for the women, as the topic of suicide was very prevalent in the interviews and in Murad's book. A former ISIS fighter explains in an interview with the Montreal Gazette (2018): *"The [female] prisoners were sure that they would be killed. This made convincing them to go with the foreign fighters [to be raped] much easier when compared to the prospect of death"* (Montreal Gazette, 2018). Yazidi woman Halida says in a National Post (2016) interview: *"He raped us every night for 10 days. I couldn't protect myself. He raped me, fastened my hands and feet to the bed. I tried to kill myself with electricity but it didn't work"* (National Post, 2016). Murad (2017) recalls a conversation she had with a woman in the facility she was taken to the day she was kidnapped: *"Some girls rub ashes or dirt on their faces, or mess up their hair, but it doesn't matter because they just make them shower and look nice again. Some of the girls have committed suicide, or tried to, by cutting*

*through the veins in their wrists right over there," she gestured to the bathroom. "You can see the blood high on the walls where the cleaners don't notice it"* (Murad, 2017, p. 86). Through the objectification of the female body, the Yazidi women were left powerless and voiceless as their agency and autonomy was reduced to the objects of male sexual desire and an object of punishment for their cultural beliefs based on the religious ideology and dominant male power structures of the Islamic State.

# Discussion

*Key findings and interpretations in the analysis*

Through a theoretical analysis of the written and oral discourse surrounding the Yazidi genocide and sexual violence of Yazidi women and girls by the Islamic State, I have analysed how ISIS's ideological interpretations of the Qur'an is rooted in their ideological and social structures focused around gender roles, relations and structures. Through a poststructuralist analysis, the role of context surrounding the interpretations of religious texts are important to fully understand the meaning of the text when it was written, to whom it was written and the events leading up to the conclusions taken in the Qur'an or other holy, Islamic texts. When taking out the context, the meanings can be shaped to fit a narrative which fits the agenda of political or ideological movements. As the Islamic State's ideology is based on concepts and ideas which seeks to build an ideal Islamic caliphate, where non-Muslims must be punished or killed, they will misinterpret the original meaning of the Islamic texts by removing the original context, replacing it to fit their narrative. When I read through passages of the Qur'an without knowing the full context and without studying the meaning in detail, the message was hard to fully grasp and understand to its fullest extent without searching for further context, discussions and elaborations on the meanings behind the different surahs. Through a first impression of the scriptures, some were easy to misinterpret through the mentions of violence, gender structures and war. Through a deeper dive into the context of these texts, it was easier to understand what the text really is trying to convey to the Muslims. It is only the passages of the Islamic texts which relate to violence which are removed from its full context within the surah, and shaped into a request to do violence against non-believers and women (wives or slaves). In the context of the full surah, one can see how

the Qur'an is promoting peaceful practices, equality between men and women and kind treatment towards slaves, only resorting to use violence as an option when they are attacked first by the aggressors.

ISIS's treatment of women and girls is based around their ideological interpretation of the Islamic texts, as well as the discourse surrounding their social structures and relations. The men justify their actions through the Qur'an, through writing rules about the treatment and ownership of female slaves based on passages from the Qur'an taken out of context, and does not allude to how slaves are actually to be treated in the Qur'an. The female slaves is used as a tool by ISIS to persuade men to join their group, and their actions of rape and sexual violence goes against all of the teachings in the Islamic religion.

The gendered aspects of this genocide is in the frontline according to the feminist theoretical analysis, as the Yazidi men were killed because of their faith, while the women were kidnapped and turned into a sexual object to be sold and used by the ISIS fighters. In social structures and systems based on more conservative and traditional values, which the religious ideology of IS is rooted in, there is a higher inequality and social expectations surrounding men and women, where there is a high emphasis on masculine and feminine gender roles. While the masculine characteristics are rooted in traits such as war, bravery, stoicism, strength and protection, the feminine characteristics are rooted in being peaceful, motherly, dependent and pacifists. These characteristics keep women from taking part in more traditionally masculine fields such as politics and the military, making them less heard and more vulnerable to gendered violence. The sexualisation and objectification of the female body through a masculine power structure makes the female body vulnerable to sexual violence during war and conflict, as the female virtue and value is often tied to her sexuality and reproductive system. Because the female body is dehumanised and moulded into an object of male desire, the Yazidi women were not punished for their faith through death like the men were, they were forced into a new role of sabayas, an object to be conquered, used and sold to satisfy the desire of the male ISIS fighters.

*The limitations of the study and analysis*

During the research and writing process of this thesis, the importance of studying the Islamic religious texts were important to understand the full context behind the passages ISIS use to justify their actions against the Yazidi population. An issue which often occurred

during the research behind the surahs were how different the interpretations of the different passages or chapters in the book were, and how much history and important background information related to social structures, politics, historical figures and events and many other different factors were important to fully understand the full context of what just one small passage of the Qur'an was stating. The different interpretations and discussions were sourced through Islamic scholars, sources of the Islamic texts online, the introduction of the surahs in Salahi's book (The Qur'an: A Translation for the 21st Century), and through discussions online through Islamic sites discussing the Qur'an. Because the different texts could have unlimited interpretations, I had to limit my conclusion of the meaning behind the different parts of the surahs I chose to include in this thesis, to the most common and relatively shared agreement on how the text should be interpreted in the right context. There were multiple texts from the Qur'an I wanted to add in my analysis, but chose to not include as the information important to understand the full context of the surah would almost require a thesis within itself. Because of this limitation to have clear and precise answers to how the Qur'an is supposed to be interpreted, as it requires a lot of background knowledge and provide different meanings depending on who is studying the texts, the explanations behind the actual meanings of the Islamic texts are overall simplified versions of a complicated discourse surrounding the texts.

## Conclusion

The Yazidi population has through their history been targets of Islamic movements and campaigns because of common misconceptions and misinterpretations of their religious figures, stories and culture. They have been branded as devil-worshippers and pagans because of these wrongful assumptions, forcing them to relocate and live under constant threats from extremist Islamic groups and movements such as ISIS. In August 2014, ISIS invaded the Sinjar region, where the majority of the Yazidi population is situated. The Yazidis who did not flee from Sinjar were taken captive. The men were killed, while the women and girls were forced into slavery, raped, forced to marry and be sexual slaves to ISIS fighters.

ISIS justifies their sexual violence and genocide (jihad) through an ideological interpretation of central Islamic, religious text, such as the Qur'an. Through a poststructuralist discourse analysis of the surahs related to their use of religious jihad and

sexual violence, their actions violates the real context behind the words of God, which needs to be analysed through the full context of the surah, the historical context of when it was written, and the different social structures present at the time during the creation of these religious texts. Through a poststructuralist analysis, I have looked at the discourse and construction around gender and sexuality, which norms keeps people from expressing their sexuality or become victims of forced structures related to sex and sexuality and the gendered discourse and structures leading to sexual violence and rape. The Yazidi women were not only victims of a discourse surrounding religious ideology, but also a discourse related to gendered sexuality, where the men have the power over the female sex. The women are spoken of as items to sell and use through the slave market and official ISIS pamphlets, not as humans with their own autonomy or agency.

The sexual violence against the Yazidi women were not only a result of a religious, ideological attack by a jihadist terrorist group. Through a feminist theoretical analysis, the women were targeted specifically related to their sexual bodies, through the discourse, construction and social relations surrounding the gendered aspects of sex and sexuality. The discourse surrounding gender and sexuality determines who is the dominant and who is the subordinate, which representations are given a voice and which are not. The discourse surrounding female sexuality is often rooted in their virtue, making her body and soul linked to her role as a sexual being. The Yazidi women who were virgins and unmarried were seen as more valuable and pure to the ISIS fighters at the slave market. The construction and discourse surrounding gender and sexuality made the Yazidi women and girls not just targets of genocide, but of genocide through the use of sexual violence and forced sexual slavery. Their body was not just marked as the body of an infidel and unbeliever, as the Yazidi men who were killed for their religion were. Because the Yazidi minority is dependent on a pure lineage, where you can only be married or engage in sexual activity with another Yazidi to belong to the minority, the female body was actively being used as a tool of genocide. ISIS justified their actions and ownership of the female Yazidi slaves through an ideological interpretation of religious scripture, but their actions of sexual slavery were based on the recruitment of fighters, ethnic cleansing and ideological, political goals of an Islamic caliphate subordinated to their own Sufist Islamic order.

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